

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 10, 2005

Commission on Systemic Interoperability
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Commissioners:

We write to welcome you to the inaugural meeting of the Systemic Interoperability Commission and thank you for devoting your perspective, expertise and energy to this effort.

As you know, truly strengthening and improving our health system will likely hinge upon the extensive adoption and utilization of electronic health records and information sharing. Information technology can enable efficiency, safety, quality, choice and savings that all patients seek. Health care is the only major economic sector that has failed to fully embrace the potential of information technology tools and there is broad and strong bi-partisan support for changing the status quo. Recommendations for future action are abundant, but there is little consensus on how to prioritize resources and harmonize efforts among all interests within the health care sector.

This Commission was created in the Medicare Modernization Act (P.L. 108-173) to contemplate precisely this challenge. You are charged with developing a comprehensive strategy for the rapid adoption and implementation of health care information technology. This is a significant challenge under any circumstances, but you are further challenged by the swift speed at which you must work. The report you put forward at the conclusion of your work should serve as a roadmap to a universal, privacy protected, interoperable electronic health record for every American. Since passage of the Medicare Modernization Act, we have also been encouraged by President Bush's strong embrace of these goals, and we expect your work will complement the course being charted.

Achieving this goal will require a strong public and private partnership. It is precisely your expertise and experience in private industry that Congress and the Administration must call upon. You are all recognized in your respective fields. As a Commissioner you now carry an additional responsibility to hear from and represent your peers from every perspective within our health care system - from providers to plans and from patients to payers.

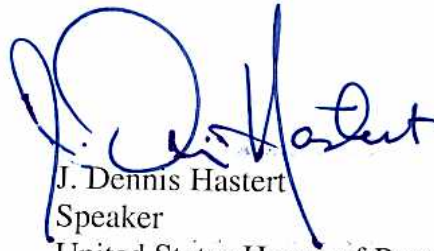
Innovative activities are taking place in communities throughout the globe and across the country. We encourage you to draw upon these resources and the people who are making real change through clinical health information systems, creating a public record to support your recommendations. Your work will be critical to making the vision for health information technology a reality, so we urge you to keep practical application in mind as you develop recommendations and draft your report. We also encourage you to work with due urgency to take advantage of the opportunity that lies before us this year.

We have the utmost confidence in the work of this Commission, and we look forward to working closely with you over the next several months. Thank you again for your participation and service to our nation.

Sincerely,



William H. Frist, MD
Majority Leader
United States Senate



J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker
United States House of Representatives

Cc: The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services